

Silent Night, Holy Night

by John R. Rice

John R. Rice's sermon explores the significance of the birth of Christ as celebrated in the carol 'Silent Night'.

Scripture: Micah 5:2, Matthew 1:20, Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:4, Luke 2:10, Galatians 4:4

Topics: "Christmas Story", "Fulfilling Prophecy"

Description

John R. Rice preaches about the miraculous birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, emphasizing the humble circumstances of His arrival, being born in a stable because there was no room in the inn, fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 5:2. The sermon highlights the significance of Christmas carols written by various Christian figures like Charles Wesley, Martin Luther, Isaac Watts, and Phillips Brooks, with a special focus on the beloved carol 'Silent Night' written by a Catholic priest, Joseph Mohr, and organist Franz Gruber. Rice delves into the biblical accounts of the shepherds being visited by angels, the Wise Men following the star to find Jesus, and the importance of aligning with the Scriptures in recognizing the fulfillment of prophecies in Christ's birth.

Transcript

The Christmas Carol

By an Austrian Priest and Organist

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David.) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." -Luke 2:4-7.

How many beautiful Christmas carols or hymns there are! Charles Wesley wrote, "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," and we sing it to the music by Felix Mendelssohn. Martin Luther wrote, "Away in a Manger," words and music. Isaac Watts wrote, "Joy to the World," with music by George F. Handel. The famous Episcopalian preacher, Phillips Brooks, wrote the words for "O Little Town of Bethlehem." There are a number of others that rejoice the heart and make melody at Christmastime by Christians. We suppose the newest Christian Christmas song is my own little song, "Jesus, Baby Jesus."

"Silent Night" was written by a Catholic priest, Joseph Mohr, pastor in the Austrian Alps in a little town of Oberndorf. It was Christmas Eve, 1815, when he meditated on the wonderful story of the birth of Christ and wrote the sweet, simple verses of this song. The next day he took them to the village schoolmaster, an organist, Franz Gruber, who prayerfully put them to music that fits them so quietly and so well. And that night they had the choir sing it for the first time with only guitar accompaniment, since the organ had broken down . Through the years this sweet song drifted out to the world and now millions of people rejoice as they sing

Silent night, holy night,

All is calm, all is bright

Round yon virgin mother and Child.

Holy Infant so tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace,

Sleep in heavenly peace.

The name "Bethlehem" means house of bread. It is some six miles south and a little west of Jerusalem on the way toward Hebron. It was the home of David and of Boaz and Ruth before him. Micah 5:2 prophesied that the Saviour would be born there: "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

So when Caesar at Rome decreed that all must go to their families' ancestral homes to report for taxation, Joseph and Mary, his virgin wife, heavy with child, came from Nazareth, nearly a hundred miles north in the province of Galilee. They came to Bethlehem because they were of the house and lineage of David. The little town was crowded. There was no room in the inn, and they were given a place in the stable and there Mary brought forth her firstborn son, the Lord Jesus. Now they show a cave as the birthplace of the Saviour and over it is built the Church of the Nativity and another church beside it. However, no one knows for sure exactly where Jesus was born. Queen Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, selected this cave as the birthplace of Christ but it was way over three centuries after His birth. The area had been ravished by war a number of times and there may have been not a single house remaining that anybody could know Jesus was ever there. So she selected a cave. Over it was built the Church of the Nativity.

I think the dear Lord does not want us worshiping a place so He did not let it be settled surely, either the place of the birth of Jesus or the house in which He lived in Nazareth or the place of crucifixion or the tomb in which He was buried. All that is left a little unsure lest men should worship as an idol a mere place when the Lord wants us to worship the Saviour Himself. I have been many times in that cave and there we sing, "Silent Night," and speak of the birth of Christ. At least it represents the place where Jesus was born, whether it is the exact place or not.

1. Christ Born in a Stable

Silent night, holy night,

All is calm, all is bright

Round yon virgin mother and Child,

Holy Infant so tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace,

Sleep in heavenly peace.

It is true that there was no room for them in the inn. Does that seem sad? No, surely that foretold that the Lord Jesus would be a Man of sorrows and He would be acquainted with grief. He came to be abused and rejected as well as to save all who would receive Him. So Jesus is fitly born in a stable. Since He is to be "anointed. . .to preach the gospel to the poor. . .to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives," it is suitable that His coming be announced to ignorant shepherds and not in the palaces of the mighty but to the poor. But remember, this is a glad time. Jesus is born to die on the cross, but, oh, praise the Lord He is born! The shepherds heard the angels say, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." So it is a joyful, happy time. So the song very properly says,

"All is calm, all is bright

Round yon virgin mother and Child."

Mary is in sweet peace and joy over her God-given Son. The Baby sleeps peacefully for He is in God's care and has entered His earthy mission. Psalm 22:9,10 says, "But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly." And that indicates that even the Baby Jesus was somehow conscious that He was from God and that His hope was in God His Father. I think I see a bit of a smile upon the face of the sleeping One there in the manger cradle. "Round yon virgin mother and Child," the song says. Oh, yes, Mary is still a virgin. And the angel had said to Joseph, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 1:20). Ah, yes, this Baby Jesus is the "Seed of the woman" which was promised Eve. This birth of Christ fulfills the promise of Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." Oh, here is Immanuel, God with us in human form. I was shocked the other day looking in a hymnbook and saw that this first verse of "Silent Night," had been wickedly changed, and the liberal, unbelieving hand that changed that first verse took out "Round yon virgin mother and Child," and put other words. Oh, but Mary is a virgin and Christ is God in human form.

Jesus, Baby Jesus, of a virgin mother born, Laid in manger cradle, wrapped in swaddling clothes and warm.

Birth cry in a darkened stable, in the inn no room. Jesus, Baby Jesus, Son of God, to share earth's gloom.

2. Angels Announce Christ's Birth to the Shepherds

Silent night, holy night,

Darkness flies, all is light;

Shepherds hear the angels sine,

"Alleluia hail the King!

Christ the Saviour is born,

Christ the Saviour is born."

Yes, suddenly the darkness turns bright as day and the Heaven is filled with glory!

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. " It was the Angel Gabriel who had announced to Mary up in Galilee nine months before that she was to be the mother of the Saviour. We suppose this is the same Angel Gabriel bringing glad news. The "Field of the Shepherds" is not far from Jerusalem, and we suppose it is the same field where the shepherds watched their flocks by night. It may be also the same field of Boaz where Ruth, the Moabitish young woman who came back to Israel with her mother-in-law Naomi to live under the shelter of God's wings--and there in the field, perhaps, where Ruth gleaned and got acquainted with Boaz. The announcement is wonderful:

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in, swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."-Luke 2:10-12.

Ah, the Saviour is born! And the angel says they may find Him in the city wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Then suddenly all the heavenly host filled the skies, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The shepherds were told they would find the Baby Jesus "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger," and they went quickly to find Him. Oh, they believed the story; they were glad to hear it. King Herod heard it and was troubled. The scribes and Pharisees knew where the Saviour should be born and they told Herod it would be in Bethlehem, but they did not heed the glad news brought them by the Wise Men from the east. But these shepherds were so glad to hear it! Oh, whoever reads it, be sure you run to see Jesus and know Him for yourself and go away to tell it gladly as they did.

3. Wise Men From Afar Are Alerted by a Star to Seek Jesus

Silent night, holy night,

Guiding Star, lend thy light;

See the eastern wise men bring

Gifts and homage to our King!

Christ the Saviour is born,

Christ the Saviour is born.

The Scripture says, "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." They are "wise men." The term reminds us of the wise men, the magi, in the book of Daniel. And these are from the east, so if we go back

some 500 miles or so to the site of ancient Babylon we find, no doubt, the area from which these wise men came.

They said, "We have seen his star in the east." Note carefully, they did not follow the star, traveling all this way. They had seen the star in the east as a warning, a reminder. But it seems evident they knew from the book of Daniel that the Messiah would come, and that He would be King of the Jews .

In Daniel 9:25 Daniel had been inspired to write it down, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times." And it is interesting that although nearly all the Old Testament is written in Hebrew, certain parts of Daniel, including this part, are written in Chaldaic and so God must have intended that the Scriptures there should be kept in the Chaldean language so they would know about the coming of the Saviour. He is to be a Prince or King and He is to come to Jerusalem. And we are plainly told that it is to be sixty-nine weeks of years from the time Jews were to go back from captivity until the coming of the Saviour. So they took what they knew from the Scriptures and then had a sign from God to verify it and they came.

Later they came to Jerusalem thinking the Saviour, a King, would be born there. There scribes and elders told them, as Herod insisted, that the Messiah must be born in Bethlehem six miles away in the city of David and now they came to find it. But how will they find the house? Ah, there is the star. They see it again and it stops over the house where the Child lay and they came in to see the Baby Jesus.

We are told that they opened their treasures and brought forth gold, frankincense and myrrh--gold, no doubt, as a proper tribute for a king and myrrh for the suffering of a Saviour as picturing the spices of His burial, and like the bitter herbs with which the Passover lamb was eaten, and frankincense for worship to God, for Christ is God.

Oh, Wise Men, let us kneel beside you by the manger cradle and to Jesus let us open our treasures and bring all we have to the Lord Jesus.

Wise men came to see Him, having seen His star afar, Bro't their gifts of precious gold and frankincense and myrrh. Herod heard, was troubled, could not kill the Holy Child. Jesus, Baby Jesus, King and Priest, and Saviour mild.

4. Greater Than the Star Was the Leading From the Scripture

Silent night, holy night,

Wondrous Star, lend thy light;

With the angels let us sing

Alleluia to our King!

Christ the Saviour is born,

Christ the Saviour is born.

There were wonders and marvels to astound the mind and lift up the heart, give a lilt to voices of praise the night Jesus was born. His birth was itself a miracle. It was good news to all people. He is Christ the Saviour.

The angels were miraculously present and it was so important that it seems every angel in Heaven wanted to join in the glad refrain, the chant, of peace on earth.

The star was wonderful, too. Some think it might have been the conjunction of two of the planets in the heavens that made an extra brightness. No, no. This was a special star. Was it like a comet across the sky? Was it like a meteor falling into space? No. In those days before there were any telescopes, they did not have a great many names for heavenly bodies, they did not differentiate between ancient planets and suns and meteors and comets. This star was especially created for this time to announce the Saviour. The Wise Men saw it in the east, and again when they came to Jerusalem they saw the star resting over the house where the Baby Jesus lay. We suppose then that star disappeared having run its course, having made its holy announcement.

But do not miss even a greater marvel than the angels and the star and the divine leading of these Wise Men. They came according to the Scriptures.

Oh, the birth of Jesus was wonderful, but it was foretold and this is the Gospel "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." All the other miracles and manifestations are subject to a divine pattern, a divine schedule written down in the Bible. It was in "the fullness of the time" that Christ came, as we are told in Galatians 4:4. That is, He could not come before and He could not come after--He must fulfill the Scripture, and He did.

So wise men studied the Scriptures yonder in the area of ancient Babylon. Old, old manuscripts and books they studied until they came across what Daniel had prophesied. When they came to Jerusalem, they needed more light. They came as far as they knew how. They came into Jerusalem, but they found now the Scripture said the Saviour would be born in Bethlehem, so they came to Bethlehem. In the east they were to follow the Scriptures but they had a star then to verify their decision and comfort their hearts. Now they follow the Scriptures out to Bethlehem and again God gave the star to give additional light.

Do you not see again, as we sing about the Christmas story, that the virgin birth of Christ is far better than any fairy tales of Santa Claus and reindeer and sleighs? Do you not see that the story of the announcement to the shepherds and the Wise Men coming from the east is far more joy and blessing than the worldly festivities and drunkenness and feasting and revelry? Let us rejoice then in the blessed Word of God this Christmas season.

Jesus, Baby Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, Tempted, poor and suffering no one knows us as He can!

Holy, righteous, blameless, fitting sacrifice complete. By His blood atonement, God and sinners in Him meet.

Now, let us sing again this sweet Christmas song, "Silent Night, Holy Night," for

"Christ the Saviour is born,

Christ the Saviour is born."

Oh, make sure that you take Him as your own Saviour, that you trust Him for forgiveness, that you love Him and give Him all your heart and all you have.

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